



OUR REPORT ON MENOPAUSE, MENSTRUATION AND PREGNANCY/BIRTH EXPERIENCES IN DEVON

243 women & menstruators shared their experiences via our county-wide survey, these were our key findings:

Overall, menstruation and menopause have a negative impact on every aspect of life including mental health, close personal relationships, and work life.

For respondents who identify as spiritual: spirituality is the only aspect of life where the menopause and menstruation was recorded as having more of a positive than negative impact.

Even those who have been through, or are going through, menopause have an average rating of 5/10 when asked how informed they feel.

The availability of advice on menopause, menstruation, and postnatal care is very poor and a large proportion of respondents have felt uninformed and unprepared during these major life transitions.



ACCESSING ADVICE

We asked respondents to rate the availability of advice on menstruation, menopause, pregnancy & childbirth



HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE AVAILABILITY OF ADVICE ON THE MENOPAUSE?



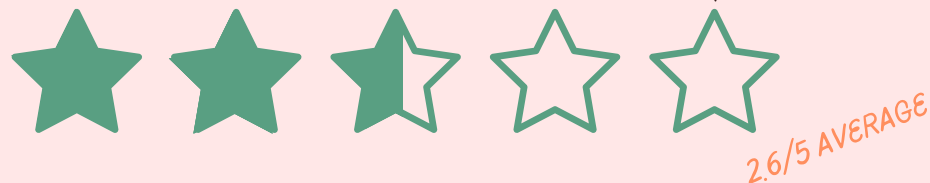
HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE AVAILABILITY OF ADVICE ON PREGNANCY?



HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE AVAILABILITY OF ADVICE ON MENSTRUATION?



HOW WOULD YOU RATE THE AVAILABILITY OF ADVICE ON POSTNATALLY?



"WE NEED A MASSIVE EDUCATION PROGRAMME IN MY OPINION - FOR WOMEN AND THEIR PARTNERS, EMPLOYERS AND HEALTHCARE PROFESSIONALS. INFORMATION IS OUT THERE, BUT IT IS SO OFTEN CONFUSING, CONTRADICTIONARY OR PUSHY OF ONE MODALITY" - ANONYMOUS QUOTE FROM SURVEY

"I FOUND THAT POSTNATAL CARE FOCUSES SO MUCH ON THE INFANT AND MUCH LESS ON HOW THE MOTHER IS DOING"

- ANONYMOUS QUOTE FROM SURVEY

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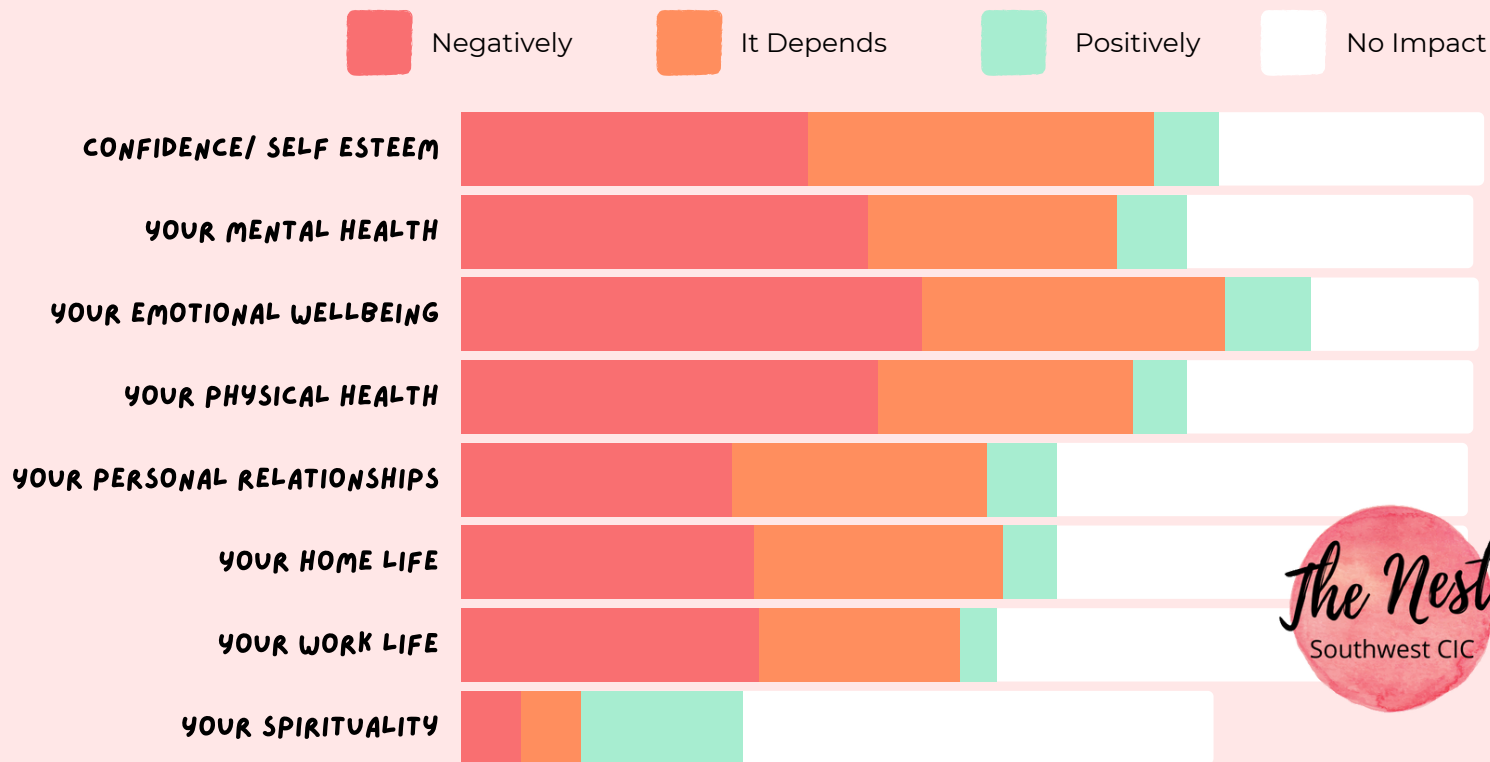


MENSTRUATION

"YOU SHOULDN'T BE ASHAMED OF HOW YOU FEEL OR HOW MENSTRUATION AFFECTS YOU! THERE ARE A PLETHORA OF WAYS THAT YOU CAN BE IMPACTED BY MENSTRUATION AND HOW THAT, IN TURN, AFFECTS YOU IS COMPLETELY VALID."
 - ANONYMOUS QUOTE FROM SURVEY

All women and menstruators experience this differently and yet so many responses on our survey shared similar stories or themes about the impact that the menstrual cycle has on life, and what they wish they knew before it started. The Nest Southwest will use this valuable information to ensure less young girls go into this experience uninformed and unprepared.

HOW DOES THE MENSTRUAL CYCLE IMPACT DIFFERENT PARTS OF YOUR LIFE?



Almost half of women said that their menstrual cycle had a negative impact on their emotional wellbeing. Only 7% said it had a positive impact. The rest said 'it depends' or that it had no impact at all.



WE ASKED "WHAT DO YOU WISH YOU HAD KNOWN WHEN YOU FIRST STARTED MENSTRUATION?", THEN WE ORGANISED THE ANSWERS BY THEMES/KEY TERMS, READING EACH ONE CAREFULLY.

PERIOD PRODUCTS

"DIFFERENT TYPES OF PRODUCTS AVAILABLE, INCLUDING MORE SUSTAINABLE OPTIONS. THAT IT SHOULDN'T BE A TABOO TOPIC."

"I WISH I HAD KNOWN ABOUT THE MOONCUP YEARS AGO."

SOCIAL/EMOTIONAL EFFECTS

"HOW MUCH IT WOULD AFFECT MY MOODS - AND STRATEGIES ABOUT HOW TO MANAGE THAT - ESPECIALLY IN MY TEENS AND TWENTIES WHERE IT WOULD TRIGGER TERRIBLE BOUTS OF DEPRESSION AND NEGATIVE THOUGHT PATTERNS."

SHAME/STIGMA

"THAT IT'S OK, NOT DIRTY, IMPORTANT TO EAT WELL AND REST. THAT IT IS A SACRED TIME NOT SHAMEFUL."

"THAT IT'S OK TO TALK ABOUT IT AND NOT BE EMBARRASSED OR ASHAMED BY IT."



MASTERING THE CYCLE

"HOW TO MANAGE PMS, HORMONAL MIGRAINES, FOOD CRAVINGS, NORMAL BODY CHANGES, PMDD AND WHAT TO LOOK OUT FOR, LIFESTYLE ADAPTATIONS TO MANAGE THE LUTEAL PHASE, INFO ON EMOTIONAL, PHYSICAL ETC SIDE EFFECTS, STRATEGIES AND HAVING AN OPEN DIALOGUE WHERE THESE THINGS ARE DISCUSSED."

PHYSICAL SYMPTOMS

"HOW IT'S SUPPOSED TO FEEL AND ANYTHING TO LOOK OUT FOR I.E UNUSUAL DISCHARGE, BLOOD CLOTS, PAINS."

"HOW TO REDUCE THE PAIN AND SYMPTOMS, AND HOW TO DEAL WITH HEAVY PERIODS."

POSITIVES OF MENSTRUATION

"IT IS A NATURAL THING AND A WONDERFUL PART OF BEING A WOMAN! I WISH I HAD KNOWN TO LIVE IN RHYTHM WITH IT, RATHER THAN PUSHING MYSELF. NOW I AM ABOUT TO STOP HAVING PERIODS, I FEEL MORE APPRECIATIVE OF THEM, AS A FORM OF RELEASE AND A SIGN OF MY AMAZING FERTILITY."

MENOPAUSE

The taboo surrounding menstruation continues into the stage of menopause - and as a result, there is not enough research or professional help that can be easily accessed. The physical and hormonal changes affect almost every person that goes through menopause - and yet, it can leave you feeling isolated due to the lack of support. Fortunately, there are more conversations now being had around the menopause, and **The Nest Southwest** want to be at the forefront of fostering an open and empowering dialogue about it.

"PERSONALLY: MENOPAUSE HAD A HUGE IMPACT AND ONE I WASN'T AT ALL PREPARED FOR. I WENT FROM A HAPPY PERSON TO ANXIOUS, LACKED MOTIVATION AND GENERALLY UNHAPPY"
 - ANONYMOUS QUOTE FROM SURVEY

HOW DOES GOING THROUGH MENOPAUSE AFFECT YOUR LIFE ?

Not all respondents had experienced menopause or perimenopause so only 93 out of 243 responses were used for the following stats:

We asked:
"HOW WELL INFORMED DO YOU FEEL ABOUT PERIMENOPAUSE AND MENOPAUSE?"



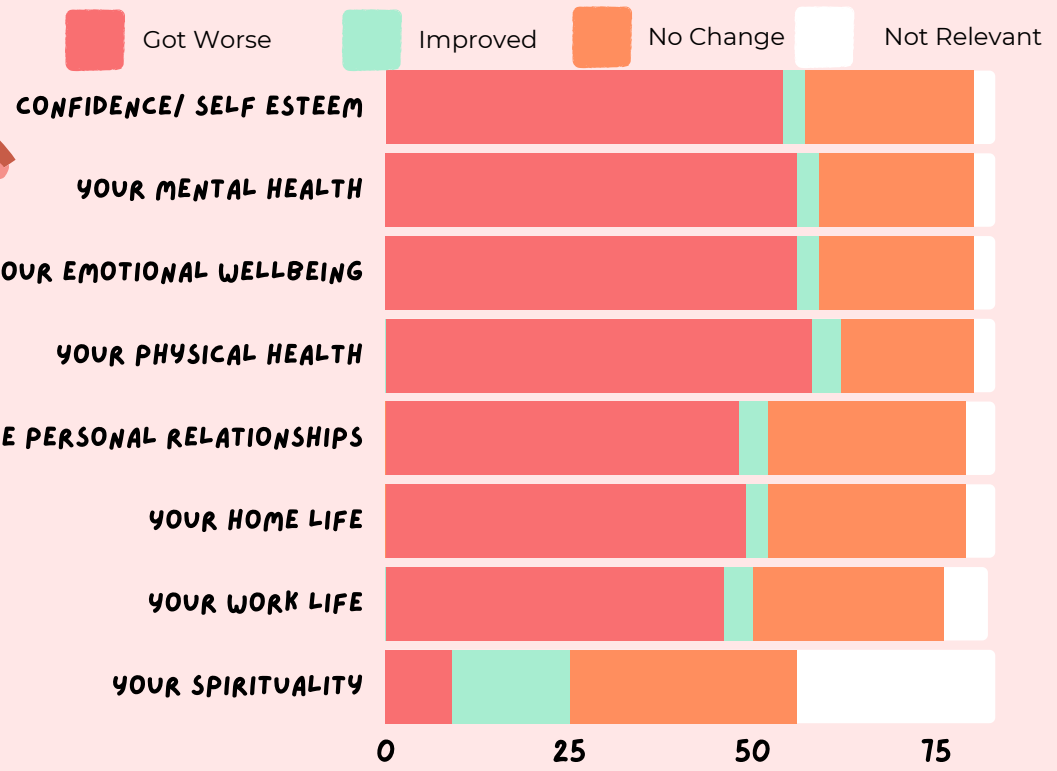
Average score from women going through menopause right now (perimenopausal or menopausal)

1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10

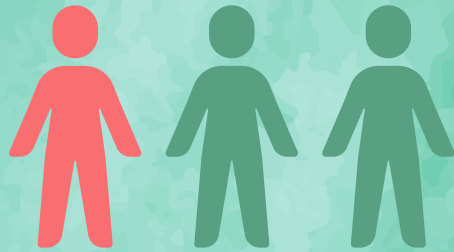
Average score from women who haven't yet experienced menopause (menstruating or pregnant)

Average score from women who have been through it (post menopausal)

WHERE THE NEST SOUTHWEST WOULD LIKE EVERYONE TO BE



100



1 IN 3 RESPONDENTS RATED THE LEVEL OF SUPPORT THEY RECEIVED DURING THE MENOPAUSE OR PERI-MENOPAUSE WITH THE LOWEST MARK ON THE SCALE: 1/5

WE ASKED FOR RESPONDENTS TO SHARE ANY THOUGHTS THEY HAVE ABOUT MENOPAUSE, THEN WE ORGANISED THE ANSWERS BY THEMES/KEY TERMS, READING EACH ONE CAREFULLY.

We saw a trend in stories about the Social/Emotional Effects of the menopause, and poor experiences when reaching for help via the NHS. A majority of respondents mentioned feeling Unprepared/Uninformed about the entire experience. There were also many comments about the lack of education on Physical Symptoms, and potential treatments like Hormone Replacement Therapy.

"THERE IS LITTLE UNDERSTANDING OF MENOPAUSE, WE NEED TO TALK ABOUT IT, UNDERSTAND IT BETTER & SUPPORT ALL WOMEN GOING THROUGH IT, NOT TREAT THEM LIKE THEY HAVE DEPRESSION OR JUST AN AGE ISSUE!"

"I AM GLAD THAT IT IS BECOMING MORE TALKED ABOUT, AND HOPE THIS WILL MEAN EVERYBODY UNDERSTANDS IT BETTER - ALL GENDERS, ALL AGE GROUPS, FRIENDS, FAMILY, WORKPLACES, I COULD GO ON"

"CHANGES CAN BE QUITE DRAMATIC AND CAN AFFECT PERSONAL AND FAMILIAL RELATIONSHIPS, SO MORE RESEARCH ON THIS LIFE CHANGE AND HOW IT AFFECTS WOMEN, AN EXPLORATION OF NATURAL SOLUTIONS, OF EMOTIONAL SHIFTS, AND THE NATURAL REMEDIES THAT COULD SUPPORT THE CHANGE WOULD ALL BE WELCOME"



PREGNANCY & BIRTH

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There is much transition during the experience of pregnancy and childbirth. The body goes through changes when pregnant, which continues after giving birth, and becoming a parent is a **huge life transition** in of itself. Change brings unfamiliarity, so being able to access advice and support is key to the physical and mental health of not just the baby - but also the parent.

We asked:

"WHAT DO YOU THINK ARE THE KEY GAPS IN ADVICE AND SUPPORT DURING PREGNANCY OR POSTNATALLY?" THEN WE ORGANISED THE ANSWERS BY THEMES/KEY TERMS, READING EACH ONE CAREFULLY.

The comments revealed that there is a huge gap in postnatal care for the mothers. Many mothers said that they felt supported up until the birth and then 'left to it' once the baby is born. Many also said that there is not much advice for the physical and mental health of the mother, despite there being plenty for the baby.

"THERE NEEDS TO BE MORE INFORMATION ABOUT YOUR BODY AFTER PREGNANCY. BLEEDING AND OTHER AFTER EFFECTS. POSTNATAL SUPPORT AFTER 10 DAYS IS VERY POOR."

"WOMEN NEED BETTER ACCESS TO MENTAL HEALTH ADVICE AND THEY CONDITIONS THEY MAY EXPERIENCE DURING/AFTER PREGNANCY AND WHY THEY ARE EXPERIENCING THEM."



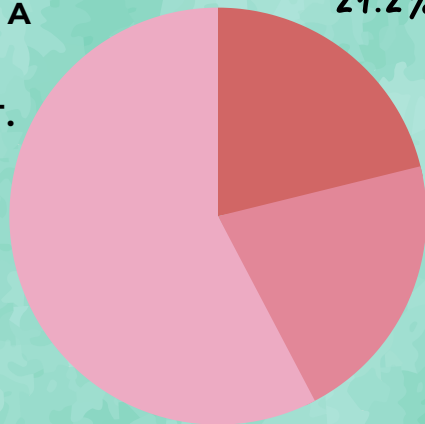


APPRECIATION FOR THE CYCLE

Many of the comments left in both the menopause and menstruation section were about the **empowering** and **positive** aspects of these life transitions - but also that it isn't really talked about or taught. Having access to this knowledge has a huge impact for each individual, as it makes menstruation a more positive experience and allows that person to **harness the power of their cycle**.

IN THE SURVEY RESULTS, SPIRITUALITY WAS THE ONLY 'ASPECT OF LIFE' WHERE MENSTRUATION & MENOPAUSE HAD A POSITIVE AFFECT, MORE THAN A NEGATIVE AFFECT.

POSITIVELY
57.1%



NEGATIVELY
21.2%

IT DEPENDS
21.2%

"I WISH I HAD KNOWN EARLIER THAT IT IS A BEAUTIFUL, POSITIVE, AMAZING THING, WE CAN HONOUR OUR CYCLE AND BE IN TOUCH WITH IT AND KNOW OURSELVES BETTER THROUGH IT"

"CONNECTION TO EMOTION, SPIRITUALITY, AND SOUL TRUTH. IT'S A GIFT TO THOSE WOMEN WHO CAN RECEIVE IT"





What comes next?

The massive response to this survey has shown just how important these life stages are, and what a huge impact they can have across many areas of life - from work, to home, relationships, mental health, emotional well-being, and spirituality. The case for social, emotional, and informational support is stronger than ever.



The Nest Southwest CIC will look at the report's implications for women, girls, and menstruators in Devon and use what we learn to create services that improve their health, well-being and education. Follow us to find out more and get involved.

THIS PROJECT WAS FUNDED BY COMIC RELIEF COMMUNITY GRANTS- FIGHTING FOR GENDER JUSTICE: PROJECTS TO IMPROVE EQUALITY FOR WOMEN AND GIRLS. ALSO, THANK-YOU TO PLYMOUTH UNIVERSITY CAREERS SERVICE FOR THEIR INTERNSHIP SCHEME.



WHO WE ARE. The Nest Southwest CIC is a not-for-profit, social enterprise, community interest company set up to support women and girls through the major life transitions of menstruation, pregnancy, birth and menopause.

WHAT WE DO. Our mission is to provide social, emotional, & informational support, for a more informed, confident, ecologically aware community where transitions are supported and respected. We offer compassionate peer support, and provide a safe, nurturing environment to explore emotional & physical literacy as we traverse these gateways.

WHAT THIS IS. 243 women and menstruators in Devon shared their experiences with us in a recent survey. This report collates the data and the stories told to show how these rites of passage affect many different aspects of life and where support is most needed.

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